

# AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES

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## press information

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#### *Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot biography*

Dr. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, a sociologist and professor of education at Harvard, grew up with a passion for education - one that runs deep in her family history. In the early 1900s, her paternal grandparents, Charles Lawrence, Sr. and Letitia Harris, left Boston to work as teachers at a rural school in Utica, Mississippi. Her maternal grandparents, Sandy Alonzo Morgan, an Episcopal priest, and Mary Elizabeth Smith, a school teacher, carried on the family's teaching/healing legacy at St. Mary's Church in Vicksburg, Mississippi.

In 1932, Dr. Lawrence-Lightfoot's mother Margaret received a scholarship to Cornell where she was the only African-American undergraduate, and went on to become a renowned pediatrician and child psychiatrist. One of Dr. Lawrence-Lightfoot's eight books, *Balm in Gilead: Journey of a Healer*, is a biography of her mother. Her father, Professor Charles Lawrence II, was an eminent sociologist and social activist, and an early student of W.E.B. Du Bois.

Sara Morgan Lawrence was born August 22, 1944 in Nashville, Tennessee, the middle child of three siblings who are all deeply involved in education today - her brother Charles III is a law professor, her sister an Episcopal priest. Dr. Lawrence-Lightfoot graduated from Swarthmore College, studied at the Bank Street College of Education and received her doctorate in the sociology of education from Harvard, where she now holds the Emily Hargroves Fisher endowed chair at the Graduate School of Education. Upon her retirement, it will become the Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot endowed chair, making her the first African-American woman in Harvard's history to have an endowed chair named in her honor.



As a scholar, Dr. Lawrence-Lightfoot explores the cultural contexts of learning, the social organization of schools, and the relationship between families, schools and communities. In addition to *Balm in Gilead*, her books include *I've Known Rivers*, which traces the development of creativity, resilience and wisdom in the life journeys of middle-class African-Americans; *The Art and Science of Portraiture*, which documents her pioneering approach to social science methodology; and her most recent, *The Essential Conversation: What Parents and Teachers Can Learn from Each Other*.

In 1984, Dr. Lawrence-Lightfoot was awarded the prestigious MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, better known as the "genius award," and in 1993 she received Harvard's George Ledlie prize for research that makes the "most valuable contribution to science and the benefit of mankind." She has received 26 honorary degrees from universities and colleges in the United States and Canada.

Dr. Lawrence-Lightfoot is the mother of two children, a daughter, Tolani, and a son, Martin David.



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